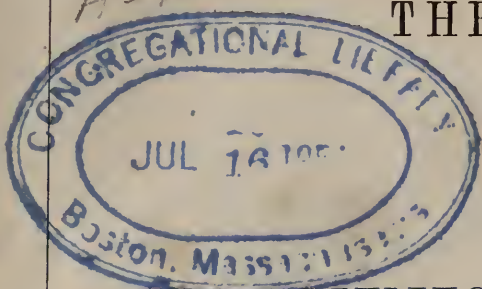


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THE DIGNITY  
OF  
THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED IN THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN TUSKEGEE,  
ALABAMA, MARCH 27, 1853,

AT THE

ORDINATION

OF

PROF. ARCHIBALD J. BATTLE.

BY


H. H. TUCKER.

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THE DIGNITY  
OF  
THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.  
A SERMON.

“I magnify mine office.”—Rom. xi. 13.

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THE dignity of the ministerial office, shall be my theme to-day. It is needless, and unworthy of myself, as well as of the position I occupy, to disavow the paltry motive, of wishing to elevate the sacred profession in the eyes of the world, for the mere sake of the poor distinction thus to be gained for its members. But I will observe that we may know the object proposed, to be a worthy and a proper one, because it has the sanction of Apostolic example. The Apostle to the Gentiles, was not insensible to the dignity of his calling, when he used the language of our text. As he once claimed to be “a citizen of no mean city,” so here he seems to claim the honor of holding no mean office.

Elsewhere he says, with his accustomed energy of emphasis, “Am I not an *Apostle*?” evidently indicating



that his holding such rank was a matter of momentous consideration. With the example of the Apostle before us, we too, should magnify our office.

But, aside from this example, if there be dignity in our profession, it is right that it should be known, in order that we may endeavor to sustain that dignity as we ought, and that others may be led to appreciate it as they should. The fact that it is right for us to consider this subject, becomes more striking, when we consider the evil that would result from its neglect. A man who is insensible to the dignity of his own position, will act accordingly, and thus bring dishonor at once upon himself and on his profession. Nothing can be more evident, than that neither we nor others, can act up to the claims which our holy calling has upon us respectively, unless we know what those claims are. Reason and Scripture, thus both justifying my task, I shall proceed to set forth some of the points, which constitute the dignity of the Gospel ministry.

1. *Our office is dignified, then, in the first place, because of the powers of mind required to discharge its duties aright.* Actions which are purely mechanical, requiring the exercise of no thought whatever, may be performed by brutes. Those which are mechanical, but which yet require some slight degree of thought, may be performed by persons of inferior minds. Those that are purely intellectual, require a still higher degree of mental power; and in the world of

thought there are subjects that cannot be grasped by ordinary minds, and can be understood and appreciated, only by those of superior endowments. Now, we place on all these actions, an estimate, in exact proportion to the degree of intellectual energy which they call into exercise. That which exhausts the mental resources of our profound and erudite philosophers, is eminently more worthy of our regard, than those minor and meaner things, which are the occupation of the uncultivated and imbecile. In pursuance of this principle, the dignity of any calling, may be fairly estimated, by the powers of mind necessary for the proper contemplation of the subjects it involves. Let this rule be admitted, and how immeasurably superior to all else on earth, is the office of him whose duty it is, to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ, and unfold the perfections of an infinite God! How instantly it springs up before us, like a giant,—like a tower,—like a mountain, heaved up by some convulsion of Nature, hiding its top in heaven, leaving what we thought were tall and majestic trees before, to wave their little tops just at its base! Yes, all earthly professions are of the earth, and reach not beyond its atmosphere, nor through a tithe of it. But this is heavenly; broad as the earth, and therefore includes them all; high as God's throne, and therefore throws all else into insignificance. He must be ignorant indeed of the subjects contemplated by the Christian

ministry who requires argument to convince him that they are vast beyond all comparison with anything else that can occupy the human mind. Let him consider a single one of the attributes of God,—his eternity, for example:—let him study it for days, or weeks, or months, and see how his mind will stagger beneath the stupendous theme; and it is well if his powers are not crushed with the mighty load, and his mind destroyed for ever. Let him study the omniscience of God, and see how his soul, overpowered with such conceptions, will shrink back into its cell, and whisper, “O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Let him study till he fully comprehends, the truth embodied in the words, “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;” and see if he does not feel that his powers are expanded to a degree of tension, which if it were increased, would destroy him. Thus let him meditate on theme after theme, such as the Gospel involves, and attempt to fathom their depths; then let him turn his attention to the things that we call science, and he will be like one, who

“With the thunder talked, as friend to friend;

\* \* \* \* \*

Then turned, and with the grasshopper, that sung

His evening song beneath his feet, conversed.”



These he can comprehend, but the truths of eternity are incomprehensible. These he can measure; but that which is infinite is unmeasured and immeasurable. Such subjects, are constantly within the contemplation of the man of God. If there be anything under heaven that is dignified, is not this it? Can there be anything *in* heaven, more dignified than the investigation of eternal truth? The geologist, looks into the earth, and pries into the hidden secrets of her dark recesses. The astronomer, pierces the abyss of heaven, and, with his mighty telescope, beholds the blaze of worlds whose light falls not on the eyes of the vulgar. But the theologian, stands with the world for a pedestal, regarding the host of heaven, but as the sparks, of the glory of Him who created them, and looks beyond their stupendous cycles, up into the character of Him who rules the universe, and actually investigates the depths of the bosom of God!

If it be asked, why is it that we should penetrate such mysteries, when the Gospel we preach is intended for the poor, the weak, and the illiterate, and must therefore be adapted to their comprehension; I answer that to comprehend the truths that we preach is one thing; to *make* them thus comprehensible is another thing; and the latter cannot be successfully done without a much greater amount of knowledge than is actually presented. Those, at least, who have had experience in the business of education, if not all

others, will appreciate the statement, that if the teacher does not know more than the pupil, the latter will be but poorly taught. To know and understand a thing requires a certain amount of mental power; to be able to teach it requires a certain other, and much greater, amount of power. If the astronomer would describe to you a distant star, he must first examine it; and the mental processes that he must go through, before he can thus penetrate the depths of heaven, and unfold its secrets, are incomparably greater than those of him who simply listens to, and understands, the *results* of the philosopher's labors. It is easy enough to understand the facts, that such a star exists, that it is of such magnitude, and performs its revolutions within such periods; but to ascertain these facts is not so easy; and he who accomplishes this task must be acquainted with many mathematical, and other truths, which it is needless to present to his pupil. So, the *results* of theological inquiry, are easy enough to comprehend; but to attain to those results, and to inculcate them successfully, requires a much greater degree of mental power, and attainments in knowledge much more extensive, than the mere pupil is ever expected to make.

But the necessity of a profound knowledge of eternal truth, may be further illustrated, and in another way. When we wish to operate on one thing, by means of another thing, we must understand the nature of both.

Thus, the physician, who would operate on the human system, by means of a medicinal agent, must have a knowledge of physiology, and pathology, (i. e. of the nature of disease and of the human body) on the one hand, and of chemistry and materia medica, (i. e. of the nature of remedial agents) on the other. For no matter how well he understands the nature of the human system, and of the disease, if he be ignorant of the nature of the remedy, the result of his using it, might be most infelicitous. Or no matter how well he understands the nature of the medicine, if he be ignorant of the disease, and of the nature and functions of the human system, he might misapply the remedy, and the result might be fatal. Now, human nature, is the subject that the minister of the Gospel would operate upon, and the nature of God as set forth in his truth, is the means by which he would operate upon it. By virtue of the principle which we have just been considering, the Gospel minister, to be prepared for his task, must understand both the nature of men, and the nature of God; and thus are brought within his contemplation the noblest themes that the universe can afford. The proper appreciation of *such* subjects, it must be admitted, requires the most exalted capacities of created beings.

Intellectual philosophy, which teaches the laws and the nature of the human mind, is considered one of the most noble sciences, that engages the attention of



men. How dignified a position in the history of the world, is accorded to such men as Bacon, and Stewart, and Locke, and Reid, and Brown, and others, who have investigated the mysteries of our intellectual nature. The preacher, of all men in the world, has most need of this philosophy, and to be qualified for his calling, he must be acquainted with it. For it is the human mind on which he would operate, and in order to do this, as we have already seen, he must understand its nature. But if so exalted a station, is accorded to the mere philosopher of mind, how much more glorious is the rank of him who unites that philosophy, with the philosophy of heaven, and by the combination, brings life and immortality to light, and salvation to a world.

This comparison of the intellectual dignity of the preacher's work, with that of the investigator of mental philosophy, leads me to compare the ministerial, with other professions. Shall we introduce the profession of medicine? It, deals with that which is tangible, visible, material, and mortal, and is therefore inferior to that which deals with what is intangible, invisible, immaterial, and immortal. Its remedies, are earth-born, but ours, is the *materia medica* of heaven. The physician, prescribes drugs and chemicals, we, administer God's eternal truth. Far be it from me, to detract from the hard-earned and well-earned honor, of that noble profession, whose office it is to relieve the sick and soothe the pangs of the suffering, and whose members,



like angels of mercy, visit the bedsides of the afflicted, and smooth the pillows of the dying ; or, to give them the credit of a better comparison, who, like our Saviour, “go about doing good.” Let me not, I say, detract from the honor of those, whose occupation is so much like that of Jesus of Nazareth, whose favorite employment it was, to heal the sick and the afflicted. But I must say, that nobler credit is due to the faithful minister, who administers to sin-sick souls, the balm of the Gospel. The subject that he acts upon is nobler, the subject with which he acts upon it is nobler, and the comprehension of each requires capacities as much superior, as the soul is to the body, or as eternal truth is to objects of sense.

Shall I introduce the profession of law ? I love to do honor to that noble profession. Once myself an unworthy member of it, I still love, cherish, and revere its sublime principles. I still admire, and almost worship the minds of those who are capable of fathoming its vasty depths, and wrestling with its mighty truths. But if the Law be “the perfection of reason,” the Gospel is the perfection of God. What is there that is profound or sublime in human law, that is not more profound and more sublime in the law of God ? Moreover, the objects of the legal profession, are the interests of this life, and sometimes life itself ; but the objects of the sacred profession are all of *eternal* interest. How vast the difference, and how superior the latter !

Shall I introduce the orator, or regard the man of legal lore in the character of an advocate? What powers of mind does their calling exercise, that are not required in far greater degree by the preacher of the Gospel? What mighty eloquence does he need, to carry such measures as he proposes, in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and all his angels! What splendors of rhetoric does he need, to make unwelcome truths, *attractive* to those against whom they are directed,—*so* attractive that they will come to hear them though they be like hissing bolts aimed at their bosoms! What tremendous logic does he need, to convince those, who are determined not to be convinced! What powers of illustration and elucidation must he possess, to make plain, things which his audience are predetermined not to understand? What inventive genius he must have, to make that which has been a thousand times told, appear new and striking! Put your orator before the same audience two or three times a week, and confine him substantially to the same class of subjects for years together, and see how his powers would be taxed. Yet this is the constant duty of the Christian ministry. What immense intellectual resources it requires! Put your advocate before a jury, and let it be his task to make them convict themselves of capital crimes—not to convict some poor culprit who is alone to suffer, while they who pronounced him guilty are at large, but to

convict *themselves* ; and what gigantic powers of mind would be required ! Yet this is the preacher's daily task. The unconverted man to whom he speaks, is judge, jury, and witness, in his own case, and the preacher must by main strength of argument and persuasion, compel him to convict *himself*, and that too, when the penalty is capital punishment, *prolonged to eternity* ! Ye lawyers ! who find it so hard to induce a jury to convict the most abandoned reprobate in the country, especially if *capital* punishment be the result, and that although the death that ensues is temporal and not necessarily eternal, tell me, which of you would undertake such a prosecution as this ? Should one of you succeed in such a case, would you not consider it the most brilliant achievement ever reported in the annals of the bar ? Yet just such a case as this, the Gospel minister undertakes, every time he addresses the truth of God to this sinful race.

Shall I introduce the mathematician ? The difference is like that between two men wishing to ascertain the size of a building or other object, one of whom takes a line and measures it, and the other, having no such opportunity, stands off, and by the mere exercise of his judgment, unaided, except by sight, determines its dimensions. The mathematician, has within his grasp, certain rules and principles known to be infallible, which will lead him to all the depths of his science. The theologian, has also certain prin-



ciples known to be infallible, but they will not lead him to all the depths of his science. He has no measuring-string, as it were, and it is only by a kind of reasoning far superior to that required in mathematics, that he can arrive at all the truth he seeks. Moreover, the objects to which mathematical truths are applied (so far as they are applicable to *anything*), are all of merely temporal nature ; but the object to which theological truth is applied, is the immortal human soul, and for this reason, if for no other, no comparison can exist between the dignity of the sciences.

Shall I introduce chemistry, astronomy, or any of the natural sciences ? These all refer to material and insensible objects, and by how much that which is immaterial and immortal, and capable of infinite happiness or misery, is superior to that which is material, perishable, and capable of neither happiness nor misery, by so much, is the profession which teaches of the one, more dignified than that which teaches of the other.

Thus, with whatever profession we compare that of the Gospel Ministry, a moment's inspection shows that the difference in their dignity, is like the difference between time and eternity. Now it is natural to us, and it is right, to estimate a subject, by the powers of mind that it calls into exercise. If this be a correct principle, with what reverential awe should we regard the sacred profession ! If it be asked, who among us has powers of mind sufficient to meet the tremendous



obligations of this holy calling ; I answer that no one is sufficient for these things. Probably if the powers of angels were vouchsafed to us, we should still be inadequate to the task. But our inability to meet fully the obligations of our profession, does not make it the less dignified. The fact that it is too great for human powers, only shows that it is just that much above all other professions, which are within human powers. But although at our best we must fall short of the full discharge of our duties, yet we ought to prepare for it as well as the limits of our nature will allow. No man ought to enter upon the Christian ministry, who has not strong and well-cultivated powers of thought. I have no hesitation in saying that a man who is not intellectually qualified to succeed in any secular profession, is not fit to be a minister of the Gospel. If he be not qualified for the less, how can he be for the greater? If he has not mind enough or mental training enough, to make him fit to be trusted with our lives, or with our property, how shall he be trusted with eternal truth and the salvation of our souls ?

2. But I must proceed to another of the points which constitute the dignity of our profession. *It is dignified, then, because it calls into exercise the noblest feelings of our MORAL nature.* It is a work of pure benevolence. It is wholly and purely disinterested. There is no selfish end to be gained by it. Fame and honor can

be obtained much more certainly and more speedily almost anywhere else than here. The same talent that makes a man distinguished as a minister, would, in half the time, place him in the front rank of politicians. As for emolument, it is well known that a degree of talent and energy which in the ministry will scarcely command a bare and scanty subsistence, would never fail, if exercised in other professions, to win splendid fortune for its possessor. As for ease, there is no profession so intensely and insupportably laborious. I think I could demonstrate, did time allow, that the labors of the faithful minister are, and necessarily must be, greater than those of any man living. Moreover, there are in this profession a thousand sore trials to be borne, and bitter draughts to be taken that the world knows not of, and that no one else is called to endure. He who enters upon it, may expect a life of toil, and trial, and trouble, and temptation, and thankless self-sacrifice and persecution. He must expect to be the target for the whole world to shoot at. He may expect his very brethren—those who are nearest to him, and who therefore have the best opportunity to strike a fatal blow, to make his bosom the mark at which they will aim all the shafts of an exhaustless quiver. There are many within the walls of our Zion, who seem never to fail of expedients to injure the feelings, usefulness, or character of him who ministers to them in holy things. He may

expect, as a matter of constant and every-day recurrence, to have his motives impugned; and at the very time, perhaps, that he is suffering for the ordinary conveniences and comforts, if not almost for the very necessities, of life, he may expect to be accused of preaching for filthy lucre's sake, and that, too, when he knows that by devoting himself to other business, he might live in luxury and affluence. He must expect remarks to be made about him in all quarters most unkind and cruel. He must expect to be called proud, and vain, and self-conceited, and bigoted, and to be charged with a thousand other vile things that his soul abhors. Scarcely ever have I known a minister to escape such charges. He may labor till his brain reels so that he can scarcely see his way as he walks the streets, and yet he will be accused of indolence, and his labors will be said to be very light, and if he receives a bare subsistence, he will be considered as well paid, if not overpaid for his services. Moreover, what he receives from his parishioners is for the most part considered by them as *given* to him, and not *paid*, thus making him an object of charity, and they look upon him the while with a patronising air, as though they had done him a *favor*! Nor is there any cessation from his trials and his toils. That sweet restorer of physical and mental energy, the Sabbath, which other men enjoy, and which gives opportunity to their exhausted powers to recuperate,



brings no repose to him. For him the Sabbath, so far as it is a day of rest, never dawns. No matter how his spirits may flag, or his health fail, he has no rest,—he must toil on at his laborious calling,—the accustomed entertainments and instructions of the sanctuary cannot be dispensed with. Two, or perhaps three, well-digested and carefully-prepared orations, must be delivered to men who will cruelly find fault, and mercilessly criticise his efforts if they fall below a high standard, and give him no thanks for his pains if he succeeds to their satisfaction, and suppose that the honor of being listened to, is a sufficient remuneration for his services. Thus he may expect to labor on till his nervous system is destroyed and his mind shattered, and suffer in spirit, till his heart is broken by the unkindness and neglect of those for whom he ministers, and preach until the blood gushes up from his worn-out lungs and chokes his utterance, and then he may expect to lie down and die in poverty, and leave his family penniless. This is no fancy sketch. It is the actual history of the devoted Christian minister's life in a great proportion of cases, unless he has some other dependence besides his profession. In the day of judgment thousands of ill-treated, half-starved Baptist ministers will rise up and testify to the facts. Thousands of widows and children of faithful ministers, who have died in the harness, will rise up and tell the story of their wrongs, their poverty, and their destitu-



tion. True, these things ought not to be so, and it is a burning shame and crying sin that they are so. But thus they *are*, and in this condition we find our profession. Now what selfish end is to be gained by entering such a profession as this? It is an immolation of every personal interest. But in spite of discouragements that are enough to sicken the heart and appal the spirit of the most dauntless, through fire and through flood, sacrificing self, the faithful minister presses on, and consecrates a lifetime to the good of others.

Pure disinterested benevolence is the most exalted of all our moral feelings. It is more than this—it is the most glorious attribute in the character of Jehovah. “God *is* love,” says the Scripture. An expression so intense in meaning as this, is never used in regard to any other attribute; from which we may infer, that this is peculiarly characteristic of the Almighty, and does in a peculiar manner and above all other perfections constitute his glory. Yet it is this pure and holy principle that actuates the Gospel Minister. Is there any dignity in being actuated by the same motives, and desires, and feelings that pervade the bosom of the Almighty? Then there is dignity in the Christian ministry. The very same principle that brought the Son of God from Heaven, leads his ambassadors into their sacred work. No other motive than that which brought the Gospel *to* the world can spread the Gospel *in* it.

Angels doubtless looked on with holy admiration at this manifestation of a Saviour's love. The principle has not lost its purity nor its value by keeping. It is as heavenly now as then, and as worthy the admiration of glorious intelligencies. I doubt not, that whatever men may say, bright angels look on with holy delight at the Christ-like occupation of the faithful minister.

There is another motive, however, which operates on the minister of the Gospel, aside from benevolence to his species, and I am not sure but that it is the predominant principle. In some cases I know it to be so. It is a pure desire to promote God's glory by the promulgation of His truth. No doubt, one of the chief and most delightful employments of the spirits of the blest, is to promote the glory of their Creator. Certainly there can be no higher nor more noble employment than this, and none more worthy of glorified spirits. The most exalted office of any created being on earth or in Heaven—saint or seraph—is to reflect the glory of the great I AM. Yet to do this, is the great object of the Gospel minister's life, and nearest of all things to his heart. Is the human heart susceptible of an emotion more amiable, more refined, more ennobling, more exalted, or more acceptable in the sight of the Almighty? Are beings of the highest created rank capable of a motive more glorious? Search the bosoms of angels—look into the brightest and holiest spirits that burn around God's throne, and you

find no purer or worthier principle than this. Now combine with this a disinterested desire for the salvation of men, (and these two objects, the glory of God, and the salvation of men, are the only two that the Gospel minister has in view), and what a combination we have! One motive, such as angels always feel in the presence of God, when they cast their crowns before him, and cry "Holy! holy! holy is the Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" The other motive, identical with that which brought the Son of God from his exaltation to this sinful world. One motive worthy of angels, and the other worthy of God, and both in combination constitute the main spring of ministerial action. Now, if it be true, as it certainly is, that any occupation is dignified in proportion as it calls into exercise the noblest and best feelings of our moral nature, what is there on earth that can compare in dignity with the Gospel ministry?

3. But there is another reason why we should magnify our office. *It is because our commission is from Heaven.* When an individual is appointed by a dignified body to represent its interests or wishes, his office partakes of the dignity of the body which constituted it. The minister representing the government of Mexico, or of some of the South American States, resident at the seat of our national government, is regarded with a certain degree of respect, as the representative of a foreign power. The minister from Great Britain or



France, is regarded with a certain other and higher degree of respect, because he derives his commission from a higher and more dignified source, and is the representative of a greater and more powerful nation. Furthermore, when we send our envoys and ambassadors to foreign courts, we select the ablest and most distinguished men that our country can produce, unwilling to confer such an honor on men of inferior grade. And really, to be the representative at the Court of St. James or elsewhere, of this glorious republic of ours, is no mean office. Doubtless our ambassadors, our envoys extraordinary, and ministers plenipotentiary, in distant parts of the world, feel that they occupy an exalted position, and duly magnify their office. But how do all human distinctions sink into littleness, when compared with the dignity of the ambassador from HEAVEN! He is the representative of no mean and obscure province in some remote corner of the earth,—no, nor is his the poor honor of representing the most powerful of earthly empires—he is the representative of a WORLD. Yea, more, he represents an ETERNAL world! The ambassador from the *skies* holds his commission from no crowned head which will one day be laid in the grave, from no government which Time will at last destroy; but he receives it directly from the Monarch of the Universe, whose kingdom is from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning and without end. If it be an honor to represent



an earthly empire, which will soon pass away and be as nothing, what honor is it to represent the empire of Heaven, which shall endure to eternity? If he who holds his commission from an earthly potentate, is esteemed in proportion to the dignity of the authority that constituted his office, what dignity of rank shall we accord to him who holds his commission from the King of kings, and Lord of lords? We must assign him a position as far superior to any other on earth, as Almighty God is superior to earthly powers and potentates! Here let me say that no man has a right to act in the capacity of a Gospel minister, unless God himself calls him to that office. No human tribunal, no ecclesiastical council, no convention of men nor of angels can confer that honor. Like all other ambassadors, the Gospel minister must hold his commission directly from the crown. Nor has any self-constituted holder of the office a right to exercise its functions. To hold the office lawfully, one must be called to it by God himself, and specially pointed out and designated by Heaven, as a suitable person to fill the exalted station. Fearful is the condition of those, who without proper authority, have usurped to themselves this dignity. Doubtless, at the judgment day, many will have to give account for this high-handed presumption. But look on the man who holds his office rightfully, and your eyes rest on one who has been singled out from the rest of mankind by Infinite Wisdom, and set apart and consecrated

by God himself, to the honorable and glorious work of holding forth the Word of Life. Truly, the Gospel minister is God's anointed! Truly, he should magnify his office, for it is the most exalted dignity on earth!

4. But let us turn to another consideration. *Our office is dignified, because of the greatness of the work it proposes and is destined to accomplish.* Nothing is more natural or more proper, than to estimate the dignity of a vocation by the magnitude of the objects it has in view. Look at a man whose business it is to manufacture toys for children, or to do something else equally trifling and insignificant. Then look at the statesman, whose office it is to manage affairs of national interest, to preserve the welfare and harmony of empires, and give direction to the destiny of whole races of men; and is there not a feeling of respect and reverence for the one, and of contempt for the other? If this be natural, proper, and fair, let us apply the same rule to the Gospel ministry. Observe then, that all other professions propose the accomplishment of objects which refer entirely to things of this short, fleeting, transitory life. Their value is measured by Time, and their value will cease when Time shall end at furthest, and for the most part, long before. But the Christian ministry proposes objects, the magnitude of which can be measured only by *eternity*. The difference between the finite and infinite, is just the difference between the ends to be accomplished by the

Gospel ministry, and those proposed by any other profession.

Suppose one of the planets should fall from its orbit, and rushing headlong through the fields of space, jar the harmony of the material universe for ever. What a stupendous project it would be to bring back the wandering orb again—put it in its place, and send it whirling along its ancient track ! How far beyond the power of men or angels such a mighty deed ; and even if Omnipotence were to accomplish it, what a great event it would be in the history of worlds. If there be a recording angel, who chronicles the events of eternity, what a conspicuous place on his pages would be occupied by this stupendous transaction ! May we not imagine that after the angelic historian had penned the record, his soul filled with amazement and wonder at this new exhibition of Almighty power, would exclaim with devout adoration, “ Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth ! ” But the Gospel ministry proposes to accomplish an end of as great magnitude as this—yes, infinitely greater. Its object is to save a whole world full of lost spirits, and bring them back to God, from whom they have strayed. Behold a race of immortal beings like ours, fallen from the high estate in which God created them—fallen from the magnificent orbit which they were destined to tread in the history of the universe—see them in rebellion against the Most High God—warring against heaven—



and dashed down by Infinite Justice and power combined, to an eternal destruction. But behold! they are rescued—grasped at the very gate of the bottomless pit—restored to the estate whence they fell—yea, more, put in a condition inconceivably more glorious than before, and yet more, placed where they can never fall again—where the mutations of Eternity never can shake them. What a rescue! What a spectacle! What an undertaking is this! Let such a sight burst at once upon the universe, and would not amazement and wonder dart to its remotest limits like an electric shock! Yet this is but a statement of facts which are now actually transpiring, an uncolored exhibition of a work at this moment being accomplished by the Gospel ministry.

Suppose a mere globe, a mere world of matter were to rush into the infinite depths of space and be lost for ever. It would be nothing but *matter* that was lost, and as matter is lifeless and inert, and insensible to pleasure or pain, the happiness of the universe would suffer no diminution. The saving of such a world from ruin, though it would require the power of Omnipotence, would by no means be so worthy, so noble, or so great a task, as to save a world of spirits. These are immortal and keenly sensible of pleasure and pain. If unsaved, they are destined to an eternity of misery, such as nothing but Omnipotence can inflict, and if saved, to an eternity of joy, such as none but God

can prepare. Any one individual of these spirits is worth infinitely more than a mere material world or than all the matter in the Universe in the aggregate, and there are millions of them ! They are all now fallen and must be for ever fallen, unless by some tremendous scheme, they be brought back to the estate they have lost. Is it possible that men are the chosen instruments of performing this mighty wonder ? Yes, it is the fact. We who stand before you as ministers of the Gospel, are the men who purpose to do it, and who *will* do it. I speak with confidence, we *WILL* do it. The Gospel we preach is mighty and will prevail. It is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. It goes forth conquering and to conquer ; and the day will come when He whose Gospel it is, will subdue all things under his feet, and the kingdoms of this world, shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Already have we accomplished no small part of the work assigned us. Millions of glorified spirits who at this moment are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb, are in heaven through our instrumentality. From the days of Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness, and long before his time, the fruits of our ministry have been harvested and gathered up into heaven. Millions more are now in the world, who by our efforts have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, and are now on the way to join with those who have gone

before. And when we ourselves shall have been gathered to our fathers and our voices are hushed in death, even then the echoes of the Gospel we preach, will be caught up by coming generations, and handed down from one to another, till the end of time. A caravan whose beginning was at the beginning of the history of our race, has been entering the gates of Paradise, increasing and widening with every new generation, and thus it will continue to increase and pour in its thousands, until the last of the human race shall be gathered in, and the depopulated earth shall be left without an inhabitant. This is the work of the Gospel ministry. At the consummation of all things at the great Judgment Day, the countless myriads and millions that shall be found at the right hand of the throne, will stand there by virtue of our instrumentality; for it is only by our Gospel that sinners can be saved, and if the preachers of that Gospel were hushed, it could not achieve its work.

Suppose that in that day, all who have been ministers of this Gospel should be gathered to themselves, and permitted to behold the sublime spectacle, presented by the assembled millions, brought by their instrumentality, into the kingdom of God. Suppose you draw near and join their holy circle, and look with them over the great sea of immortal and glorified spirits before you, all brought into eternal felicity by the labors of those who throng around you; then turn



and look back at the mightiest exploit of men in this transitory world, and oh, what a transition! The whole world is but a speck, and how much less than nothing the poor exploits achieved on its little surface! Now look we again to the millions of the redeemed. While they ascribe to God the glory of their salvation for ever, will they not regard with ineffable affection and reverence, the noble band of preachers, by whose influence it was, that they were brought into that glorious kingdom of everlasting joy? Will not angels and archangels who have been in God's presence for ages back, accustomed as they are to the majesty of heaven, regard with glowing admiration, the spirits of those who have not only themselves attained, which angels never did, from a lost estate to seats in bliss, but have been the means of populating heaven with the teeming millions of earth? Let the minister of the Gospel be faithful in his holy calling, let him maintain his righteous course, let him patiently endure his toils, his trials, and his hardships, let him with tears, but dauntlessly discharge his thankless task, persevering to the end, and there are glories and honors in store for him, which an angel might covet. Then shall he sweetly realize the truth, that "he that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed shall doubtless return again bringing his sheaves with him." Angels welcoming him and his fellow-laborers to their blest abode, will exclaim, "These are they that came

out of great tribulation," and they shall "stand before the throne of God, and he that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them." Then shall also be realized what the prophet Daniel saith, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever!"

5. But our office is dignified, from another consideration. *It is because it brings us into co-operation with God.* We are engaged mutually with him in a work which agreeably to his providence and the designs of his will, neither he nor we without this co-operation, could accomplish. For whatever he might be able in his omnipotence, to accomplish without the aid of created beings, who can have no power but what they derive from him, yet in his omniscience and infinite wisdom, he has seen fit so to order, that the world cannot be saved, but by human agency in conjunction with the influence of his Spirit. If the world be saved by either one of these means to the exclusion of the other, the eternal councils of God must be frustrated, and the plan which he had devised from eternity and fixed in his irrevocable decrees for its salvation, must be abandoned. So then, as God's purposes now stand and ever have stood and ever will stand, the agency of the Gospel ministry is necessary to the accomplishment of the work. We then in the language of the Apostle are "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. iii. 9).

Nor are there few expressions in Holy Writ which confirm and teach the doctrine advanced. In another epistle, the same writer, inspired by the Holy Ghost, says, "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. vi. 1). So very far is this idea carried in Scripture, that the part which we take in the Lord's work is actually represented in the light of *help* rendered to the Almighty. Says the Holy Ghost, speaking by the mouth of the writer of the Book of Judges, "Curse ye Meroz, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty" (Judges v. 23). As it were to give double emphasis to the idea of *help*, the expression "to the help of the Lord" is repeated twice in immediate succession, a mode of emphasis unusual in Scripture as well as elsewhere, and which would not have been resorted to, except to give the idea extraordinary prominence. True, this is the language of accommodation, for in one sense it is impossible that the source of all power should need help. But in another sense it is the fact, and the Scriptures do teach, that we *are* co-workers with God, and that we *do* afford him help in the prosecution of his designs, because he has so ordained that those designs *cannot* be accomplished but by our agency.

So, then, we are actually co-operating with God, and on terms of partnership with him, raised, as it were,



to a level with himself in the accomplishment of his vast designs. Those who work together, having a common object in view, actuated by the same motives, and using the same means, are certainly to this extent on a footing and equal to each other. What stupendous honor has God conferred on men, that he should raise them from the dust to be co-laborers with himself, in the mighty work of saving a world! Into what sublime companionship has the Almighty brought the ministers of his Gospel! What are the distinctions that worms confer upon each other in comparison with that which God bestows on his chosen vessels! What angel enjoys such godlike distinction? What archangel's trump proclaims the Gospel to the world? None! It is on men alone that this transcendent dignity is conferred. Nor are the elements its ministers. It is not in the voice of nature. "No breeze whispers it. No brook murmurs it." It is not in the louder voice of the cataract, nor in the thunder, nor storm, nor in the ocean's roar. The firmament speaks it not. For though "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork," though "their line is gone out through all the earth," and "there is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard," yet they tell not the tale of redeeming love. These mighty works show forth the *power* of God, but they do not exhibit his saving GRACE. No, for men, for *men* alone is the nobler task reserved to proclaim

that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." At creation, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, when they beheld the productions of his handiwork. Theirs was the honor of being witnesses of the stupendous transactions of Omnipotence. But we are more than witnesses—we are *associates* with God in transactions infinitely more sublime and glorious! Ye morning stars and sons of God! hide your diminished heads when the herald of the cross proclaims the unsearchable riches of Christ! His is an honor which was never yours. His office it is to carry out the work which the Son of God begun—to carry on the work which the Spirit of God and God the Father jointly with him and the Son, are engaged in! At the creation of man it was the language of the adorable Trinity, "Let *us* make man," and in holy fellowship the act of creation was done. Now the same adorable Godhead addresses itself to man, and says: "Let *us* convert the world;" and thus the ministers of the everlasting Gospel are brought into fellowship with the Triune Jehovah, and made partakers with him in the most stupendous transactions of eternity! Ye angels, who rejoice in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, it is yours to look on, to witness, to rejoice, and to shout at these wonders of grace, but it is ours to *do the work*, ours the tran-

scendent, and imperishable honor of being co-workers with God !

Suppose there to be one lofty spirit in heaven, taller than the rest, who had been associated with the great Eternal First Cause, in the creation of all the ten thousand worlds that roll through space ; so intimately associated with God in the creation of all these glorious orbs, that while the mighty work was in process, he could say with truth, "I am a co-laborer with God." How would all other glorified spirits look up to him, as only next in rank below their Maker ! How would his sublime and glorious majesty, in gigantic proportions tower above all the host of heaven ! But the salvation of one solitary human soul is of more moral grandeur, and of more importance to the universe, than the creation of all the matter that exists, or that eternity ever can produce. What shall we say then of the salvation of a whole race of these immortal spirits ? But in this most glorious work we are "laborers together with him." To say that I am associated with God in the creation of an atom, is no small matter. To say that I am associated with him in the creation of a world, is an assertion of tremendous import. To say that I am associated with him in the creation of the sun and moon, and all the spheres that roll through heaven, is a conception which might stagger the intellect of an angel. But to declare that I am associated with God in a work confessedly more immense, and



infinitely more glorious than *all* of these, is an assertion which may make the universe tremble! Not the mightiest archangel—if there be one who looks down on all the rest of those blazing seraphs, even as we do upon the insects of summer—not even he has ever participated with the Almighty in the creation of a single grain of sand! No! Solitary and alone, wrapped in the mantle of his own attributes, unhelped, Jehovah hath wrought the works of Omnipotence. But in the work of *grace*, which is immeasurably superior in dignity and glory to the work of creation, he has associated with him—whom? not angels, not seraphim, nor cherubim, but MEN! Astounding as it may seem, it is the fact. That work, in which there is an inconceivably great display of power, in which is exhibited unmeasured and immeasurable goodness, and the profundity of infinite wisdom, that work which in short exhibits every one of the attributes of Jehovah in such amazing proportions that our understandings fail to grasp it, and we sink beneath the mighty effort, *that* work we are associated with God in performing! Well may men, well may angels stand aghast, and blush, and veil their faces, and tremble, and prostrate themselves, when they hear a worm of the dust, with fearful boldness, assert, “In the most glorious work of Almighty God I am a laborer together with Him.” With trembling lips I assert it—with fluttering heart and curdling blood! Nor would I dare to utter it were it not

that God himself did put it in the mouth of the apostle Paul, and he has put it in mine, to say we are "laborers together with him."

I appreciate what Isaiah said, "Woe is me! for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips—for mine eyes have seen the King—the Lord of Hosts!" But saith the prophet, "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar, and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, 'Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin is purged.'" Also says he, "I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I; send me;' and he said, 'Go!'" In these latter days God has again said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" My brethren in the ministry, and one who joins our ranks to-day, and I, have each of us responded, "Here am I—send me!" And God has said to us, as he did to Isaiah, "GO!"

Oh! may "He who touched Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire," lay upon us also a live coal from off his altar, and thus take away our iniquity and purge our sin, that we may be worthy of the high vocation wherewith we are called, and not pollute the name of God nor the truth of his Gospel while we pronounce it.

Now let us take a moment's survey of all the ground

we have been over. We magnify our office, and it is dignified: 1. Because of the powers of mind required to contemplate properly the truths it involves, and to discharge its duties aright. 2. Because it exercises the noblest feelings of our moral nature—feelings worthy of angels and worthy of God. 3. Because we receive our commission directly from God, and are ambassadors of the King of kings. 4. Because of the greatness of the work to be accomplished. The field is the world—millions of immortal souls the subjects, and eternal salvation the object. 5. Because it brings us into direct association and co-operation with God, and makes us co-workers with him. Either one of these considerations, taken separately and apart from the others, places our vocation immeasurably beyond and above anything that is human. Let them all be combined, as they are, and their aggregate force places our sacred profession far above principalities and powers, and anything that is named among men, or conceived of among created beings, as the embodiment of the most exalted dignity, and of all that is pure, holy, grand, glorious, and sublime in Time or in Eternity.

A few practical reflections, and I close.

1. The minister of the Gospel ought to be impressed with an overwhelming sense of his own *unworthiness*. Although it is right that he should magnify his office



—and he is in great sin if he does not,—yet he should be careful not to magnify *himself*. He should remember that he is a worm of the dust, and that if indeed God has put him in the ministry, it is not in consequence of any superior merit in him. He must feel as Paul did, “It is by the grace of God that I am what I am.” His exaltation, instead of puffing him up in his own estimation, should have the contrary effect, and make him feel his own littleness the more by comparison with the greatness of the office he holds. If he compares himself, as he ought to do, with the magnitude of the objects his profession places before him, he will be constrained to say, “I am a worm and no man.” Should his office have any other effect than that of making him meek, humble, and lowly in spirit, as his Master was, he may know by that fact that he is not called to it of God, and is not fit to hold it, and that he has usurped its functions presumptuously, wrongfully, and sinfully. He should be ever sensible that he is after all, only the instrument in God’s hands of accomplishing the work of his ministry. His talents and endowments, however glorious, and if they be even godlike, are nothing at last but the clay and the spittle, as it were, which are used by a Superior Power in opening the eyes of the spiritually blind.

2. Magnifying his office, and bearing in mind the high qualifications requisite to the proper fulfilment of its obligations, it should be his constant object, and

the study of his life, to make himself more worthy of it. He ought to give himself to reading, to study, and to the cultivation of his mind. No man on earth has so great a use for a well-cultivated, well-stored, and well-disciplined mind. To rely on God for peculiar aid, without making these efforts, is tempting God and insulting him. The idea that a man may be listless and inactive, and yet that God will divinely inspire him to preach, is superstitious and presumptuous. With or without effort, there is in these latter days no inspiration. There was a time when it was proper and necessary, that miraculous endowments should be bestowed on some of those who preached the Gospel. But that time has long since passed. To succeed in the sacred profession now, the same mental culture and training are necessary as in any other profession, nay, far—far *more*. The faithful minister then may expect to be, as long as he lives, a student, indefatigably devoted to unremitting and intense intellectual labor. If he falls short of this, he is not magnifying his office, but degrading it.

But as his unworthiness of his high calling is moral as well as intellectual, he should also keep his *heart* with all diligence; remembering that if the unction of the Holy One be not ever upon him, all his intellectual accomplishments will be worthless. Surely, for an unholy man to hold so sacred an office, is presumption against the majesty of heaven most awful

and most damning, and in the last day will be found without parallel. In all his thoughts, in the most hidden emotions of his heart, in all his conversation, and in all his deeds, let the preacher magnify his sacred office. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

3. All mankind should honor and revere the ministers of the Gospel for their office' sake, remembering that they hold a higher rank than kings, and are the representatives of and co-laborers with the God of heaven. "Know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." Says our Saviour, in addressing his apostles, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." It is the duty of all men to listen to the ministers of the Gospel respectfully, attentively, reverentially, and if need be, *patiently*; remembering that they are divinely-appointed messengers, and that whosoever rejects them, rejects the God that sent them. They should remember that the voice of the minister, so far as he speaks the truths of God's word, is to them equivalent to the voice of God, and that when he faithfully instructs them, or calls them to repentance and faith, and a life of obedience, it is as though God himself did call to them from Heaven.



The messenger is a man, but the message is from the Almighty.

4. It is the duty of all men to sustain the ministers of the Gospel in their profession. Their responsibilities are so vast, and their duties so immense, that they cannot meet them as they ought, if their minds are at all embarrassed with the concerns of this life. They should therefore be placed above want, and above the *contingency* of want, so that they may give themselves wholly to the work. This support is to be rendered not as matter of gratuity, but as matter of debt. The same God who calls us to the ministry calls you to support us in it; and if you do not meet the obligation, and that fully and promptly, you are defrauding us, and disobeying God; and, by thus throwing discouragements in the way of the Christian ministry, and weakening its influence, and turning into a worldly channel the energies that ought to be devoted to the work of the Lord, and that he has claimed and consecrated for his own, you are guilty of a most dreadful and enormous sin. Woe to the man who stops the mouth or weakens the voice of one herald of the cross! Woe to him, who by withholding from one preacher of the Gospel the support that is due, compels him to withdraw his time, or his attention, or his heart, or the least part thereof, from his sacred work! I envy not his condition in the judgment day, who has hindered a servant of God from delivering his message,

or who, by making any unlawful or unnecessary draft upon his time, has interrupted the preparation of that message, and has therefore impaired its force, and has thus, to this extent, frustrated the designs of his Maker. It is a fearful thing to stand in the way of the purposes of God. When God calls his ministers to the honorable, and glorious, and holy work of uniting with him in the conversion of the world, he calls all other men to sustain them in it. If the latter, by the neglect of their duty, prevent the former from discharging theirs, the call of God is made of none effect, his will is set at nought, the instrumentality by which he would accomplish the most glorious work of eternity paralysed, his glory thus diminished, and his plans for promoting it subverted. What must be the result of this contest with one's Maker? Yet he who withholds from his minister one iota, one jot, or one tittle, of his due, is partaker, to that extent, of this enormous guilt. But it is the duty of all men to sustain the ministers of the Gospel, not only in the way set forth, but also by their prayers, by their hospitalities, by their kindest and most affectionate, most delicate, most reverential, and most constant, attentions. No encouragement that *can* be given should be withheld. It is the duty of other men, as much as of the messenger himself, to "magnify his office," and to promote, by every means in human power, his influence and his usefulness.

And now my task is done. One more effort have I made to unfold and enforce the truths of God's word. May it accomplish that whereunto it was sent. May we who are called to be ministers of our Lord's Gospel be ever hereafter duly mindful of the dignity and sacredness of our calling, and of the high and holy obligations it places upon us. May those to whom we minister in holy things, remember ever hereafter the obligations that God has placed them under to those whom he has called to be his messengers. And at last, when our work is done, and when all the fruits of our ministry shall have been harvested into heaven, and the sound of the Gospel shall be no more heard nor needed on earth, may we all be of that "great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," who shall shout as "with the voice of many waters," and as with the "voice of mighty thunderings," "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever!" Amen and Amen.



